

Zaccheus Macy House,
also known as Reuben Joy House
107 Main Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-934

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
52-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

ZACCHEUS MACY HOUSE,
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Location: 107 Main Street (on north side of Main Street,
on west corner of Gardner Street), Nantucket,
Massachusetts.

Present Owners: Joseph and Ida E. Amrein

Present Occupants: Amrein family

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy

Brief Statement
of Significance: Example of a mid-eighteenth century lean-to house
and home of two famous Nantucketers.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

Zaccheus Macy, great-grandson of Thomas Macy, first settler of Nantucket, bought the land from Barnabus Gardner about 1748 and is thought to have built the house at that time. Zaccheus Macy died in the house in 1797 and Captain Reuben Joy became the owner soon after.

In 1851 Reuben Joy died and left the property to Alexander E. Gardner "in consideration of manifold services rendered to me by him."

Later owners were as follows:

1885 -- Eliza M. Whitford
1892 -- Alice M. W. Seaverns
1904 -- Emily Bunker
1905 -- Harrison Gardner
1908 -- Heirs of Harrison Gardner
1908 -- Elizabeth G. Burgess
1936 -- Charles E. Burgess
1941 -- Harrison G. Burgess and Guy Burgess
1945 -- Clarence L. Sibley
1946 -- Lawrence Miller
1946 -- to date -- Joseph Amrein and Ida E. Amrein

2. Date of erection: The house formerly bore a tablet indicating that it was built about 1700, but it is more probable that it was erected some years later, after

Zaccheus Macy bought the land in 1748. It was much the same style as the Christopher Starbuck House at 105 Main Street (HABS No. MASS-939), which was of approximately that same date. (Abstract, Nantucket Lands and Land Owners by Worth)

3. Architect: None
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Built as a lean-to, the house faces south, the south part two stories in height and the north roof sloping down to one story originally. It had a central chimney and a large room on each side of the center front door, each of which had a fireplace. In the lean-to portion was a long kitchen across the north side of the chimney and here also was a large fireplace. The frame of the house is massive but plain. This was the style of house which Nantucketers adopted and clung to tenaciously as a model for construction for over half a century, and many of them still remain.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Many, many changes have been made to the house, until in the interior little now remains as it originally was. On the outside the low rear roof was raised to two stories and additions made from time to time.

Around 1920 a large front porch was added, changing the appearance of the house, but this has since been removed and it is believed that viewed from the front, the house must again look much like it did when built.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Zaccheus Macy, first owner of the house, was born in 1713 and was a man of extraordinary ability, self-educated, learned in the Indian tongue, and therefore able to help in the inevitable land troubles with the Indians. He was a whaler, making at least one successful voyage, and one of the best boat builders and earliest shippers of oil to the London market. He studied bone structure and became a bone setter and for more than forty years was the principal surgeon on the Island. Zaccheus Macy was considered wealthy and of a benevolent disposition and it was said of him that whenever or wherever anything happened that needed surgical assistance or advice he freely lent his aid, and where there was need he was ready to assist in making the sufferers comfortable, never once in his whole career sending a bill, although he handled some two-thousand cases.

When the Indians were being awapt away by the dreadful plague, he daily, as long as it lasted, had one or two sheep killed and cooked as Indians did, in an oven of heated stones in the ground. These he would carry to a ccrtain place and set a flag as a signal, while he kept to the windward and waited until he saw the food taken.

(Abstract, Talks About Old Nantucket by Christopher Hussey)

Zaccheus Macy later in life became a farmer, while also serving at different times as Town Treasurer, Assessor, Selectman and Wharfinger at Straight and South Wharves. At the age of seventy-eight he became Nantucket's first native historian when in 1792 he wrote "A Journal of Nantucket, being a short journal of the first settlement of the Island of Nantucket with some of the most remarkable things that have happened since to the present time." This was published in the Massachusetts Historical Collections, First Series, Volume III. In the same year he wrote a report for the Massachusetts Historical Society entitled "Indian Names."

Captain Reuben Joy, who subsequently owned the house, was born in 1769, went to the Pacific with the first whalers from Nantucket, and as a sealer made voyages to the Falkland Islands, the South Shetlands, Patagonia, and other little known regions. Early in the nineteenth century he sailed with Captain Mayhew Folger of Nantucket on the Minerva, the first Salem craft to circumnavigate the world. This was at the insistence of Captain Folger, because he would not go as master unless Captain Joy went also. It was Captain Folger who on a later voyage in ship Topaz discovered the hiding place of the mutineers of H. M. S. Bounty on Pitcairn Island.

Captain Joy was in command of ship Atlas in 1803 when he successfully escaped from a British frigate then impressing Yankee seamen. (Abstract in part from Ramblings by Stackpole)

In 1780 the Court and Town House was moved from its former site near No Bottom Pond, to the corner of Main and Milk Streets, directly opposite Zaccheus Macy's house. Also situated in this square where the Monument now stands was the Liberty Pole, a tall flagstaff, and a large wooden oil-lamp. Earlier this section of the town had been called "Old White Bone" because the bleached jaw bone of a whale had stood at the corner of Main and Gardner Streets. At that time records of the justices' court reflect in a slight degree the condition of the town at this time; after the war was over it was in a distressed and turbulent condition and there was much disorder. One of the frequent punishments meted out was whipping, and although not generally known but well-authenticated, between 1790 and 1800 a whipping-post stood at the corner of Main and Gardner Streets and a woman named Polly Walmsley was here publicly whipped -- her outstretched arms being tied to the back of a cart. (Abstract, Nantucket: A History by Douglas-Lithgow)

The house at 107 Main Street in the late 1890's was the home of the artist, Alexander Seaverns, who taught in the Nantucket public schools and painted many Nantucket scenes, one which became well-known being of a Quakeress in a rocking-chair before the fireplace of an old Nantucket home.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: view c. 1935 in Scrapbook Collection of Miss Grace Brown Gardner (microfilm copy in Nantucket Atheneum), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

2. Bibliography:

Douglas-Lithgow, Robert Alexander. Nantucket: A History. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914.

Farnham, Joseph Ellis Coffee. Brief Historical Data and Memories of My Boyhood Days in Nantucket. Providence: Snow and Farnham Co., 1915.
(includes photograph showing added porch)

Hussey, Christopher. Talks About Old Nantucket. 1901.

Stackpole, Edouard. Rambling Through the Streets and Lanes of Nantucket. New Bedford, 1947.

Worth, Henry Barnard. Nantucket Lands and Land Owners. Nantucket Historical Association Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 1 & 7. (includes photograph before 1900)

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Maasey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.